Volume 6, Issue 31   Atari Online News, Etc.   July 30, 2004

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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With Contributions by:

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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""

Y'now something, Joe was right last week when he mentioned that news on the
Atari Usenet has been dead lately; I've noticed it as well. I think that
the only place that seems more dead is the Boston area this week, due to the
Democratic National Convention! For weeks now, newscasters and politicians
have been "warning" the locals that there was going to be major security in
and around the city - roads closed, trains and buses re-routed, parking
bans, and the like due to the upcoming DNC. The impact on the city was
going to be horrific. Well, apparently it all worked because people stayed
away from Boston! It's like a ghost town from some of the pictures and news
reports that I've seen and heard. Did Atari users pack up and leave town
too? I know it's summer and activity generally slows, but I've never seen
the activity on the Usenet slow to this degree. Even the general news
within the technology areas has slowed more than usual. Let's hope that
it's the nice weather, and not an ominous omen of things to come!

Speaking of the weather, it's continued to be pleasant, according to my
ratings, not of those who like to see eggs able to fry on the hood of a car!
Although it's supposed to be extremely hot and humid for a couple of days
this week, the weather around here has been terrific.

Not a whole lot to talk about this week. And I've been in a somewhat bad
mood all week. As usual this time of the year, our budgets are getting
finalized and there's always frustration and tempers flaring. This year is
no different; and those of us who have to put our department's budget
together tend to try and hide from upper management to avoid the madness.
I've only been partially successful this past couple of weeks; and I've
certainly got myself singed a few times already! But, I think my department
is all set, at least until some of the final reviews occur.

So, I guess I'll mosey along for yet another week, and we'll see what
happens. The DNC will have ended by the time this issue hits the web. The
weather will warm up some more, and I'll get out and get some work done,
have a few beers, and relax.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I'm afraid that this is going to be another very short column. There are even fewer messages in the NewsGroup this week than there were last week. I guess the summer weather has a hold on people. If that's the case, I'm afraid that we're going to be short on messages for another month or so.

As I've said before, it's not really surprising that the number of messages is smaller these days. Atari hasn't produced a computer in years. The ones they DID produce are starting to show their age, and now only the true die-hards are left.

And since it's mostly real die-hards now, there are far fewer questions being asked. Fewer users with fewer questions per capita. That's a recipe for low message traffic.

It's been a rough week for me... My wife's favorite aunt passed away, and we've just gotten through the wake and funeral. Now all that's left is to deal with the memories and emptiness that many will feel. I thought the world of this woman, not because she was incredibly intelligent (she was of average intelligence), or incredibly successful (she worked in a shop all her life for near-minimum wage). What she DID have was an incredible love of life. She was always the life of the party. It was she who donned the multi-colored wig and danced around at parties with the "Groucho Marx" eye glasses. It was she who could always be heard laughing at a joke... or always be heard telling one. And it was she who cherished and adored her family above all else. She had no children of her own, but the multitude of nieces and nephews... and in later years, grand-nieces and grand-nephews... were the world to her. She truly loved and appreciated the uniqueness of each and every one of them. That's what always stood out about her to me; the fact that she saw all the good in all of her kin and had a unique bond with each of them.

Now, I've got a slew of nieces and nephews... seventeen of 'em in all... and I've found myself "connecting" with some of them better than others. Some of them, I just can't seem to reach on that special personal level. And I guess that's the way it normally is. But "Auntie Belle" connected with everyone. Everyone was special to her. She appreciated the uniqueness of each and every youngster. I don't even think it was something she did consciously. That was just her. Perhaps, since she was already in her 60's when I met her, she'd had a lifetime to perfect the "look" of connecting with anyone effortlessly, or perhaps the years made it the real thing and it was exactly what it looked like. These days, we could really, really use more like her.

Well, enough of that. Let's get to the few messages from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Joseph Place asks about a sound mixer:

"Can someone please discuss in simple terms how to go about using a Jam PRO OUT or FA8 with CAF? I've used mine previously, but it's

been awhile. I moved and can't locate the info on how I set it up in
CAF. I have the Jam PRO OUT. When I change the bus and pan in the
mixer nothing happens."

Wayne Martz tells Joseph:

"It sounds like you need to check the assignment of the objects on the
mixer map. They need to be assigned to DSP. My falcon isn't set up
right now, so if memory serves, double click on the object (pan,
fader, whatever) and it opens up a page allowing the object to be
assigned. You can do them all at once by selecting them all and making
the change while holding shift (I think!) A little dialogue will pop
up asking if you want to make that change to everything. Confirm and
close, and you should be good to go!"

Last week there was a discussion about using a keyboard adaptor for a
TT030 or MegaSTE. Mark Duckworth wrote:

"Indeed it's practical. My setup is a falcon style to mega ste style
keyboard adapter (home made, but they are selling them on ebay for $1.00
or so). Then I bought a very long 6 wire RJ-11 telephone cable
from radio shack. Cut the wire right down the center, flip it on one
side and resolder (not sure why the keyboard cable is like this, but
if you DON'T do this you will fry the keyboard controller and kill
the keyboard)."

Joakim Hˆ¶gberg tells Mark:

"If the cable is in need of being "flipped", this must be specific to
the adapter you use. The original keyboard cable is for sure *not*
flipped, so better be careful here!

IMO it would be a better idea to make the adapter work together with
the original cable instead of relying on a custom keyboard cable."

Mark talks a bit about the problem with his keyboards:

"It's the works part that's the problem. I have like 6 TT keyboards, all
with bad mylars. I need 2 of them or so for my 2 TT's as is. So I might
be able to find something, maybe not. Last night though I had to restore
my falcon from backup due to a little oops on my part. On the bright
side it proved that my backups are good!"

Brian Roland tells Mark:

"Best Electronics should still have plenty of mylars...likely in the
$50ish dollar range."

Adam Klobukowski asks for help in locating a replacement part:

"Due to a misplaced ST_RAM module I had puff of smoke from my Falcon.

Now, it boots, but:

When running NVdi - resets ,
When starting AES - freezes

I saw that part marked as J22 on my falcons motherboard is completely
melted.

The Motherboard is Rev. D/C. J22 is placed near ST-RAM module and TOS
ROM.

If anybody can check what exactly is J22, I could repair it."

Jim DeClercq tells Adam:

"J22 is the fan connector. It, from the circuit diagram, at least once had
12 volts available. That does not explain other problems. Part number
C302883.

Look carefully for a blob of melted something behind the pins of nearby
chips. That might find your problem."

Rodolphe Czuba tells Adam:

"ST-RAM is damaged !
Did you try with an other ST-RAM card ???

The smoke your saw was from the ST-RAM !!
I'm 99% sure of that !"

Adam tells Rodolphe:

"You were right!

After careful check, I found that only ST-RAM card is burned (but SIMM
module seems ok). So I put in my old 4MB card, and everything rocks
again."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time,
same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - New Design for Nintendo DS
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Spidey 2 Really Swings!
                                    Catwoman Ships!

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                     New Design for Nintendo DS

Nintendo confirmed the final name for its upcoming dual-screened handheld
hardware Thursday. However, there are no surprises in store - the
handheld's code name is also its real name. It will hit the market later
this year branded the Nintendo DS.

Thursday's announcement also included a surprise redesign of the DS
hardware, however, with a slightly smaller black base and a gently curved
platinum flip-top cover. Furthermore, the face and shoulder buttons have
increased in size-according to Nintendo, they've been "reconfigured for
optimum use". Also new is a storage slot for the touch screen stylus and
stereo speakers.

Nintendo's president Satoru Iwata remains bullish about the plans for the
Nintendo DS: "The Nintendo DS will change the future of hand-held gaming,"
he says. "Dual screens, chat functions, a touch screen, wireless
capabilities, voice recognition - these abilities surpass anything
attempted before, and consumers will benefit from the creativity and
innovation the new features bring to the world of video games."

Nintendo is currently working on more than 20 titles for the DS, and boasts
support from more than 100 third parties. The price of the device and its
precise launch date will be announced at a later time.

                 'Spider-Man 2' Video Game Really Swings

Yes, yes, we've heard it before, Uncle Ben - with great power comes great
responsibility. But the thing that makes the new Activision video game
"Spider-Man 2" so addicting is the freedom it gives you, as Peter Parker's
web-slinging alter ego, to just goof off around New York City.

Those who loved the hit movie will be happy to test themselves in the
action sequences against Doctor Octopus - battling him in the bank to
protect delicate old Aunt May, pummeling him on a runaway subway train and
finally grappling with his tentacles in a secret river hideout.

The game features some of the stars of the film as voices: Tobey Maguire as
our hero, Alfred Molina as Doc Ock and Kirsten Dunst as love interest
Mary-Jane (although the odd-looking digital version of her is one of the
game's few missteps).

But the "Spider-Man 2" game takes the story even further than the film,
with scores of alternate missions in between the movie's story points:
timed races, civilian rescues, feats of strength and bad guys to conquer,
from regular street thugs to costumed super-villains. Every now and then,
you can even help a little kid recover a lost balloon.

But for the most part, you don't HAVE to do anything. The story elements of the game can be delayed indefinitely until the player chooses to activate them, giving you plenty of time to check out the sights around the Big Apple.

Want to climb to the pinnacle of the Empire State building? Take a swing down Broadway? Hitchhike dangling from a helicopter to visit the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island? You can even pay your respects at Ground Zero, which is represented in the game by two clusters of skyward-aimed spotlights aligned along the former site of the World Trade Center.

New York is rendered in exquisite detail, and so are New Yorkers - who yell insults at you if you bump into them, holler friendly greetings as you leap about or desperately flag you down for help. Whether you choose to help is your choice, but once you stop to talk to a person in distress you've got to follow through and finish the mission.

Helping out the locals gets more fun as the game goes on, even though your standard-issue mugger/bank robber/gang thug doesn't change much throughout the game. With each completed mission, Spidey is awarded hero points that can be redeemed at various stores throughout the city for new abilities, like faster swinging, wall-running and fight moves (like swinging a crook around by your web, dangling him in a cocoon from a light pole or body-slamming him from the sky onto the pavement).

The super-jumping feature, which involves holding the jump button a few seconds until a meter is charged, launches Spidey about 10 stories into the air. If he's holding a thug, all he's got to do is chuck him aside in mid-air and that guy is finished.

The game features numerous other colorful characters from the Marvel Comics universe, most notably Black Cat, the sexy, is-she-good-or-bad character who helps Peter track down the city's more notorious criminals. Just following her through the city is one of the game's most difficult challenges.

Meanwhile, you'll cross paths with such enemies as The Rhino, the would-be alien Mysterio and the electricity-manipulating Shocker. Defeating them often requires just as much brains as brawn, since there is usually puzzle-solving involved in their downfall, along with punches and kicks.

Overall, the game shares many of the same qualities that made "Grand Theft Auto III" a hit (with none of the graphic violence). The freedom to roam, to choose which adventure comes next, and the ability to swing, jump, climb and fall to any point high or low is what sets Activision's "Spider-Man 2" apart from other superhero games.

Hopefully, Activision and developer Treyarch will create a sequel in this format, without waiting for the next movie.

This Teen-rated game (for mild violence) costs $50 and is available on PC, Sony's PlayStation 2, Microsoft's Xbox and Nintendo's GameCube. Four stars out of four.

Catwoman Ships For Playstation 2, Xbox, GameCube, And PC

Electronic Arts announced Friday that Catwoman the videogame, licensed by

Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment and based on the highly anticipated
Catwoman motion picture from Warner Bros. Pictures starring Oscar winning
actress, Halle Berry, is now available for PlayStation2 computer
entertainment system, the Xbox video game system from Microsoft, Nintendo
GameCube, Game Boy Advance, and PC CD-ROM.

The game follows the story of Patience Philips, who is killed after she
uncovers a dark secret held by her employers. Brought back to life by a
rare Egyptian cat, she becomes Catwoman and sets out to discover the truth
about herself and her murder. Players will encounter key characters from
the movie, including challenging bosses such as Armando, Hedare's head
henchman and Laurel Hedare, the beautiful face behind the evil empire.

Boasting incredible acrobatic skills, players can leap across roofs, run up
walls, pounce on prey, utilize unique "cat senses," and avoid enemy bullets
with feline grace. In addition, players can use Catwoman's whip to swing
through the air and utilize the fully interactive environments to trap or
knock her foes unconscious.

Developed by EA's UK Studio, Catwoman is rated "T" (Teen) by the ESRB and
carries an MSRP of $39.95 for console platforms, $29.95 for the Game Boy
Advance and $39.95 for PC. The game's official website is
http://www.catwoman.ea.com.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online   -   Online Users Growl & Purr!
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            CLASSIC GAMING EXPO AND VIDEO GAME COLLECTOR MAGAZINE
                  JOIN FORCES TO BENEFIT SPECIAL OLYMPICS

          Group Of Rare Video Game Items Will Be Auctioned With All
          Proceeds Given To Special Olympics of Northern California

VALLEY STREAM, NEW YORK - July 27, 2004 - Classic Gaming Expo (CGE) and
Video Game Collector (VGC) magazine today announced that a group of rare
video game items will be auctioned off at the annual Classic Gaming Expo
show auction held in San Jose, August 21, with all proceeds going to
Special Olympics of Northern California (SONC). In addition, all proceeds
from the rental of tables in the swap meet room will also go to SONC.

"We are really proud to be a part of this," said Shawn Paul Jones, publisher of Video Game Collector magazine. "It is important to us that we can share our enthusiasm in more ways than just being a sponsor of Classic Gaming Expo. Video games let you be a hero or champion, but Special Olympics helps people become champions in real life."

VGC's contributing editors have banded together to donate several rare video game items for the auction, including: an NES "top loader"; a vintage Atari 2600, mint in box; and video games from the contributors' private collections. Also, all bidders who win items donated to SONC receive free autographed copies of Video Game Collector #1.

The CGE auction will take place immediately following the close of CGE 2004's first day on Saturday, August 21. In the past, the CGE video game swap meets and auctions have seen some of the rarest and most-sought-after-by-collector items change hands. They have proven to be two of the most popular events at the show. All attendees are invited to bring their rare video gaming items to the show and sell them at the auction. Attendees are also welcome to bring video game paraphernalia to donate to the group of items that will be auctioned to benefit Special Olympics.

Classic Gaming Expo 2004 will take place at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center in San Jose, California, August 21 and 22, 2004. Additional information on attending the show can be found at CGE's Web site: www.cgexpo.com.

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                       A-ONE's Headline News
                  The Latest in Computer Technology News
                     Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

               Convention Internet Access Crashes for an Hour

Hundreds of reporters covering the Democratic National Convention were left without an Internet connection for more than an hour on Tuesday after engineers caused a portion of the network in the media center to go offline.

Web connections in the two-story media pavilion erected next door to the Fleet Center to house dozens of media outlets went down for over more than an hour shortly after 6 p.m. EDT.

"We noticed slower-than-normal traffic on the system and in making adjustments to take care of that we must have knocked some connections offline," said Peter Bowman, an on-site spokesman for Verizon Communications Inc.

While he could not estimate the extent of the problem, Bowman said he did not think "it was a wide outage by any stretch of the imagination."

A DNC spokesman said the Boston Herald and Christian Science Monitor were among the affected media. Reuters was also affected.

"Everybody is back up now," said Roland Boucher, a media coordinator at the event, which has attracted 15,000 journalists from across the world.

Web Worm Spreads, Slowing Online Search Sites

A fast-spreading computer worm that uses Web search sites to find victims made a broad assault on computers worldwide on Monday, causing problems for Google Inc. on the day it offered new details about its initial public offering, security experts said.

The spread of the worm, a variant of an Internet attack called MyDoom, was blamed for sporadic outages and slowdowns on Google - the most popular search engine - as well as the search sites of Yahoo and AltaVista.

The new MyDoom worm searches victims' computers as well as Internet search engines for e-mail addresses, and propagates itself by sending an infected file to the addresses it finds, security researchers said.

"Those search requests have been overloading the search engines," said Lloyd Taylor, vice president of technology for Keynote Systems Inc., which measures Web site performance.

The worm, Taylor said, was believed to be slowing performance on Google, AltaVista, a business of Overture Services Inc., and the Web site of Yahoo Inc.

A Yahoo spokesman said the effect of the slowdown was limited solely to their search engine, and said the site was no longer feeling its effects. The other two search companies could immediately be reached for comment.

Computer security software vendors sent warnings to customers about the worm, which has been called MyDoom.m or MyDoom.o. The original MyDoom worm spread to hundreds of thousands of computers earlier this year.

Symantec Corp., a maker of computer security software, said it had received 250 reports about the new worm in two hours, on pace with the original MyDoom attack in January.

"This is certainly equivalent to what we saw back then," said Oliver Friedrichs, a senior manager with Symantec's security response group.

Web site performance slowed broadly on Monday, suggesting the possibility that a virus or other Internet attack may be causing problems, according to Keynote.

"We are starting to see things creep up," said Keynote spokeswoman Della Lowe.

Monday's outbreak underscored the more widespread threat of Internet viruses, analysts said.

McAfee Inc. said on Monday it expected 2004 to be a record year in terms of the total number of "successful" viruses and worms, due to smarter malicious code writers and the still-common practice of computer users

opening virus-laden messages.

Brian Mann, a virus outbreak manager at McAfee, said that at current rates up to 100 successful viruses and worms could run across the Internet by the end of this year compared with a total of 20 for all of 2003.

"We're already in record territory now" in terms of the number of successful viruses, which are assessed by McAfee as a "medium-risk" to "high-risk" threat, Mann said.

Several thousand malicious code threats appear every year but never gain higher status due to protections, such as firewalls, that prevent malicious code from entering computer systems.

Suicide Hoax Is Back

If computer users will not be enticed to download photographs of Osama bin Laden's suicide, perhaps they will be lured to do so for information on Arnold Schwarzenegger's supposed demise. At least, that is what malicious code writers seem to be betting.

The new hoax surfaced over the weekend, according to computer security firm Sophos. As with the Bin Laden malware that appeared last week, unsuspecting users who click on a link associated with the Schwarzenegger "news" risk downloading a Trojan horse code to their computers that could enable hackers to control their machines remotely, in order to send spam or launch denial-of-service attacks on other Internet servers.

Instead of using the e-mail or phishing techniques so popular lately, the suicide-hoax hackers utilized the network of thousands of discussion groups known as "Usenet." The messages containing the links to the Trojan-horse code are appearing in Usenet groups. They may carry some credibility with Usenet readers, said Sophos, because Internet users increasingly are using online channels in lieu of television broadcasts to get news.

New Trojan horses and spyware are showing up all the time, Jonathan Penn of Forrester Research, told NewsFactor. The problem is that the public generally is not aware of them or the data compromises they cause.

In this case, the wide publicity given to the Osama bin Laden version of the hoax actually may have worked against hackers, because users are more suspicious of such messages now, said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant with Sophos.

Bin Laden and Schwarzenegger are not the first - and most likely will not be the last - famous or infamous people to be used in the distribution of malware. Previous e-mail messages have offered photographs of popular female stars, such as Halle Berry and Britney Spears, said Sophos. Politicians also have seen their days as lures - among them Bill Clinton and Margaret Thatcher.

In the case of the hoax involving Schwarzenegger, the false Usenet posting states that journalists have found a suicide note from the actor-turned-politician and that it can be read by clicking on the link.

Antivirus companies have issued warnings and software updates for a new
Internet worm, dubbed Zindos, that infects machines already compromised by
the MyDoom.O worm and attacks Microsoft's Web site.

Zindos.A takes advantage of an open back door in Windows machines that
contracted the MyDoom.O worm that appeared Monday. While the worm has not
knocked Microsoft's Web site offline and is not considered a serious threat
by most antivirus vendors, the ease with which it spread raises troubling
questions about the ability of virus authors to control and plant malicious
programs on machines infected by their creations, says Graham Cluley,
senior technology consultant at antivirus company Sophos.

The Zindos worm spreads through TCP port 1034, which was opened by a Trojan
horse program called Zincite that MyDoom.O deposits on Windows machines it
infects, according to antivirus researchers at Symantec.

MyDoom.O, which some antivirus companies call MyDoom.M, is the 15th variant
of the original MyDoom worm, which ravaged the Internet in January.

Zindos can infect Windows machines without any interaction from the PC
user. It modifies the configuration of Windows so the worm is started along
with the operating system. Once installed, Zindos begins searching for
other MyDoom-infected machines to send copies of itself to, according to
Symantec.

Zindos has not infected many Sophos corporate customers, which were also
spared the worst of MyDoom.O. However, the worm may be causing more
problems among home users with broadband Internet connections who lack
firewall or antivirus software, Cluley says.

Sophos experts believe that the MyDoom author created Zindos and that the
follow-on infection may have been planned all along, Cluley says.

"There are similarities in the code," he says. "And, the way MyDoom opened
the back door on computers, other viruses would have to know the right
password to be able to use it it's like knowing the right knock on the door
to get into the private casino."

The MyDoom author has shown hostility to Microsoft in the past, Cluley
notes. MyDoom.B, the worm's second version, also contained a preprogrammed
denial of service attack against the software vendor.

The Zindos worm also indicates the thriving interest among virus writers
in building armies of compromised computers, or 'bots, which can be used
to launch attacks or sold to others for spam distribution or other
nefarious purposes, Cluley says.

"Owning a large network of zombie computers is a very powerful and rather
valuable resource to have," he says.

Antivirus companies advise customers to update their antivirus software to
obtain signatures that can spot Zindos, but only customers who have been
hit by the latest MyDoom worm need to be concerned about this new worm,
Cluley says.

Those affected by that worm should remove it from their computer and
install antivirus software and a firewall to keep from being victimized by

Zindos, too, he adds.

                        McAfee Names Worst Viruses

A rivalry between the creators of the Netsky and Bagle viruses helped cause
a dramatic increase in threats in the first half of the year, but the most
serious was Download.Ject, a Trojan horse program that exploited a
vulnerability in Microsoft Internet Explorer, according to McAfee.

McAfee's Anti-virus and Vulnerability Emergency Response Team (AVERT) ranks
Exploit-MhtRedir.gen, also known as Download.Ject or Scob, as the top
threat because it was used in a high number of attacks against both
corporations and consumers. It also took advantage of the widely-used IE
browser, and was a new type of threat, says Vincent Gullotto, AVERT vice
president.

AVERT is releasing a list of the ten biggest malicious threats in the first
half of this year. For the first time, the company considered not just the
prevalence of the threat in terms of reports from end users, but also
special circumstances, Gullotto says. Those include whether the threat hit
corporations, whether it represented a new approach, and whether a patch
was available for it. The Netsky-Bagle rivalry is another factor.

About 60 percent of all the malicious threats tracked by AVERT are what
McAfee calls Potentially Unwanted Programs, giving customers the chance to
decide whether they want to keep the software. These include adware and
spyware, which may even be legitimate programs but end up on a system
without the user's knowing consent, Gullotto says. Reports of such programs
are increasing both because the software is growing more prevalent and
because McAfee has added more reporting capabilities for it, he adds.

Here are McAfee's top ten threats of the year so far:

Exploit-MhtRedir.gen (also known as Download.Ject or Scob)
VBS/Psyme
Adware-Gator
Adware-180Solutions
Adware-Cydoor
Adware-BetterInet
W32/Netsky.d@MM
W32/Netsky.p@MM
W32/Netsky.q@MM
W32/Mydoom.a@MM

The Exploit-MhtRedir.gen attack uses compromised Microsoft Internet
Information Services (IIS) Web servers to distribute Trojan horse programs.
Using two vulnerabilities in Windows and Internet Explorer, it silently
runs the malicious code distributed from the IIS servers on machines that
visit the compromised sites, redirecting the customers to Web sites
controlled by hackers and downloading a Trojan horse program that captures
keystrokes and personal data.

The only defense against the attack is in Windows XP Service Pack 2, not
available in final form until next month, and numerous Web servers may
still be compromised, Gullotto said.

"While it wasn't significant in prevalence, the significance today is that

it's used in multiple cases, and there's still no patch for it," Gullotto said.

VBS/Psyme is a Trojan horse that exploits a vulnerability in Internet Explorer and overwrites local files on the user's system.

Netsky, which first appeared in February, comes as an attachment to an e-mail message and installs itself on Windows PCs when the attachment is opened. It also tries to exploit a long-patched Microsoft hole that enables file attachments launch automatically when an e-mail message is read. The virus combs the machine's hard drive, harvesting e-mail addresses from a variety of file types, then spreads itself further. The Bagle worm and its variants, whose creators apparently carried on a war of words with the Netsky authors in hidden text inside virus code, were edged off the list because Netsky spread itself more effectively, Gullotto says.

MyDoom is included both because it was the most prevalent threat in the period and because it used a new type of e-mail message to cause users to open up its attachment. MyDoom uses subject lines such as "delivery failed" and spoofed sender addresses such as "postmaster," "Post Office" and "MAILER-DAEMON" that make the e-mail resemble a rejected message.

The total number of threats has grown over the past three years, according to Gullotto. In just the first quarter of this year, more than 21 viruses reached McAfee's "medium" rating or higher, compared with 20 in all of 2003. McAfee has added 400 to 500 new threats to its database each month this year, compared with 300 to 400 per month in 2003 and 200 to 300 per month in 2002, Gullotto says. Meanwhile, the company estimates 50 new threats are appearing daily on the Internet, and some are never reported to McAfee.

Another large and growing threat is phishing attacks, which use spoofed e-mail addresses and fake Web sites to trick users into divulging sensitive information, according to McAfee.

Judge to Make Critical Ruling in EU-Microsoft Case

The latest episode in the long saga of Microsoft Corp.'s confrontation with the European Union is set to unfold Tuesday, when representatives of the two sides meet with an appeal judge to decide if sanctions imposed against the company should be suspended.

Legal representatives for Microsoft will meet with Bo Vesterdorf, president of the European Court of First Instance, to decide if the sanctions - including a fine of -497 million ($613 million) and a demand for a version of the Windows without Windows Media Player - should be suspended until the end of the appeal process. The full appeal is expected to take several years to complete.

Although Vesterdorf described the meeting as an "informal gathering to sort out practicalities," including setting the date for the first full appeal hearing, it is understood the session will be closed to the public.

With a final judgment on the case not expected for several years, much hinges on the meeting for the future of Microsoft in Europe. The original decision, taken by the European Union's Competition Commission, had been heavily criticized by some U.S. government officials, leading to

Competition Commissioner Mario Monti to describe the EU as "more united that the United States" over the issue of Microsoft's anti-competitive behavior.

According to Monti, Microsoft had abused its dominance of the operating systems market both by tying Windows Media Player to Windows and by failing to release information about Windows to competitors in the server market. The company was given 120 days to provide information to other server vendors and 90 days to provide a version of Windows without Media Player, although both these sanctions have been temporarily suspended pending the outcome of Tuesday's meeting.

Longhorn Looks at Another Delay

The first beta test version of Microsoft's next major Windows client release, code-named Longhorn, probably won't be available until the second half of next year. This would represent another delay for the much-anticipated beta.

Microsoft had scheduled the beta for 2004, but earlier this year said its release would slip into early 2005. The company is adjusting timing for the test version again because of all the work it had to do, and still is doing, on security, especially Service Pack 2 for Windows XP, people familiar with Microsoft's product plans say.

"I don't think you will see the beta in the first half," one of the sources says. "SP2 has been a very big deal."

The first delay of the Longhorn beta also was attributed to work on SP2. Many developers working on Longhorn had been reassigned to work on the security-focused service pack for Windows XP, which is due out next month, Microsoft has said. The work on SP2 and the focus on security essentially set a higher quality bar at Microsoft, the sources say.

The beta will be released ahead of a second Longhorn-focused Microsoft Professional Developers Conference, which the company is planning for the third or fourth quarter of 2005, the sources say.

Microsoft does plan to continue distributing technical preview releases of Longhorn ahead of the beta, the sources say. The company has already made previews available at PDC and the Windows Hardware Engineering Conference last May.

A later beta could also mean a delay for the final product, which is currently expected to be released in 2006. A beta period for Microsoft products typically lasts at least 18 months, but for a major release such as Longhorn the testing period may be extended, as it was for Windows Server 2003.

Longhorn is a major new Windows release, a "big bet" for Microsoft, Chairman and Chief Software Architect Bill Gates said last year. Gates has described Longhorn as a "big breakthrough release" and the most significant release of Windows since Windows 95. Longhorn succeeds Windows XP, which was released in late 2001.

Longhorn had its coming out at the first Longhorn PDC last October in Los Angeles. It was the first time Microsoft talked publicly about many of the

features it plans to put in the operating system.

Software Company to End Pop-Up Ad Deluge

A San Diego company has agreed to stop bombarding computer users with Internet pop-up ads to advertise its ad-blocking software, avoiding a court battle with the Federal Trade Commission.

D Squared Solutions LLC, which was created by two college students, reached a settlement Wednesday with the FTC, which had filed a civil suit against the company last year.

D Squared agreed not to send pop-up ads using the Messenger function enabled on many Windows operating systems; such ads do not require an open Web browser to display. The company also won't sell ad-blocking software any longer, and it is barred from sending other ads unless users can choose not to receive them.

The company's founders, Anish Dhingra and Jeffrey Davis, do not admit wrongdoing and do not face any penalties.

The FTC's legal case against D Squared, one of the first to address pop-up ads that have become a common Internet marketing technique, was seen as an attempt to limit an often-intrusive form of advertising that exploits technology built into Microsoft Corp.'s Windows software.

The government alleged that using Messenger, D Squared was able to send pop up ads every ten seconds in the form of small dialogue boxes that usually appeared in the middle of the computer screen. This function was initially designed for network operators to send systemwide messages to employees.

The FTC said the practice was a hassle to consumers and misled them into thinking there was nothing they could do to stop the ads.

Attorneys for Dhingra and Davis claimed the pair were not trying to extort consumers with their ads and only intended to send one a day to computer users. Lawyer Anthony J. Dain has said the ads are "annoyances you have to deal with in a free society."

Google Sets IPO Price, Selects Ticker Symbol

Google says it expects to sell its shares for between US$108 and $135 when it launches its IPO by auction later this year. The U.S. search-engine company has selected "GOOG" as its ticker symbol for its Nasdaq listing.

At the upper end of Google's price range, the 24.64 million shares being issued would raise up to $3.3 billion - more than $1 billion higher than previously had been estimated. Mountain View, California-based Google plans to sell 14.1 million shares, while another 10.5 million will be sold by stockholders.

The high price indicates that Google, the world's leading Internet search-engine provider, intends to prevent the stock from rising too fast in the open market, avoiding the potential danger of a crash in price soon

after the IPO.

The price also indicates that Google will raise as much money as possible from the IPO before its stocks start trading. Including stocks held back to cover underwriters' overallotments, Google could raise up to $3.8 billion in the IPO.

Google is on target to be the biggest Internet-related IPO of all time in terms of dollar proceeds, surpassing Netscape's celebrated 1995 IPO. In addition, it may well surpass the $2.83 billion that Genworth Financial generated as the richest overall IPO of 2004.

Google filed its estimated price range with the Securities and Exchange Commission on July 26th. The filing of an estimated range usually signals the commencement of an IPO road show, when prospective companies meet with investors.

In the revised prospectus filed with the SEC on July 26th, Google reported second-quarter earnings of $79.1 million on revenue of $700.2 million, up from earnings of $64 million on revenue of $651.6 million in the 2004 first quarter. Operating income for the second quarter was $171 million, up from $155.3 million in the first quarter. Dutch Auction

As Google has chosen to use a Dutch auction system for its IPO, the final price will be determined by compiling bids from individual investors.

Google chose the auction process in order to give individual investors the same opportunity to buy its shares as mutual-fund companies and other institutional investors. In a conventional IPO, a small group of investment banks sells shares on behalf of the company carrying out the IPO to mutual-fund managers and other professional investors, putting private investors at a considerable disadvantage.

U.S. investment banks Morgan Stanley and CS First Boston are lead underwriters on the Google deal.

"Google has a very strong and loyal customer base, who joined it after defecting from Yahoo and AOL," Forrester analyst Charlene Li told NewsFactor. "But the problem is that these people moved very easily from the other search-engine providers to Google, so they could just as quickly desert Google for MSN."

Microsoft last month outlined plans to provide an all-pervasive search engine capability for MSN, so that users can carry out searches in e-mails or local files on their PCs. "If MSN can link searches very easily to e-mails or local files, then it would have a real advantage over Google, and people would be tempted to move to MSN," Li said. "Of course, Google is working on this technology as well."

Indeed, Google's listing document outlines the company's vision for its search technology to become all-pervasive on the user's desktop. For example, if someone is writing a document or creating an e-mail, Google wants them to be able to do a search using its technology without leaving their application.

Q. I've heard that frequently turning my computer on and off can hurt the performance of internal parts. But I don't want to leave it on all the time either and waste power. What's the best course?

A. While it once might have been true that computer hard drives or power-supply systems could be degraded over time by turning the machines on and off, there's little reason now not to go the green (and money-saving) route: Shut things completely down if you're not going to be using your PC for many hours.

Recent tests at Canada's University of Waterloo found that computers with Pentium 4 processors running at 1.7 gigahertz drew 110 watts of electricity while booting up and 60 watts when they were on but idle. A 17-inch cathode-ray tube (CRT) monitor added an additional 75 watts. Newer, flat-screen LCD monitors use about half as much juice as CRTs.

In a sense, then, the PC isn't a big juice hog. A microwave oven devours electricity at a rate of 750 to 1,100 watts, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

PCs in power-saving standby or sleep mode have even less of a presence. In the Waterloo tests, they were draining 35 watts. That's roughly equivalent to three clock radios.

But add up hours of standby time, and multiply that by the millions of computers in the world, and it is some serious electricity.

In fact, microchip maker Infineon Technologies AG, which is working on making electronics' sleep modes more energy-efficient, estimates that a mere 1 percent decrease in standby power consumption would save the nation 360 megawatts - the equivalent of a medium-sized power plant. Put another way, 10 percent of an average home's electricity consumption comes from machines of some kind sitting on standby, said Infineon spokesman Saswato Das.

Dell Inc., the world's leading seller of PCs, has no official position on whether its customers should leave the machines running or not. Leaving computers on all the time doesn't erode their performance, but it doesn't appear that turning them off and on does either, because the reliability of key parts has improved significantly, spokesman Lionel Menchaca said.

"There used to be a bigger difference in terms of wear and tear when you power up your PC, but it's not as much of an issue now," Menchaca said.

After the tests at Waterloo, Manfred Grisebach of the university's information systems and technology group pointed out that hard drives that never get shut down seem to live a long time. But, he said, so do drives that get shut off all the time.

"What we can't say is which last longer," he said.

Parents Reconsider Technology for Kids

Amanda Cunningham started her daughter on computers at 2 1/2 with "Reader Rabbit" software and Web sites like Sesame Street. Like any parent, she was proud Madeline could master the mouse so young. But Cunningham soon realized Madeline, now 4, wasn't really learning anything. She just kept

clicking, dragging and playing the same games over and over. Now, she's in no rush to get her 1-year-old son, Liam, on computers or the Internet.

"I just don't see an advantage (to) starting early," said Cunningham, a former teacher who now creates reading software for elementary schools.

There's no shortage of sites and software aimed at very young kids and even toddlers. Noggin.com has games and virtual coloring books for preschoolers. A Crayola licensee makes handheld video games, including one where kids race in a crayon-shaped car, for 3 and up. KidzMouse Inc. makes computer mice for small hands.

But there's growing debate over whether children should be exposed to technology so early. Some parents and scholars see no benefit, and a handful even warn of a hindrance to child development.

"Mental ability is gained from manipulating the three-dimensional world at that age and (from) managing your own mind and not having it managed by an electronic machine," said Jane M. Healy, author of "Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Mind."

Healy said computers take children away from other developmental activities more appropriate for their brains and can "easily become a habit for both parent and child."

According to a 2003 survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 31 percent of children age 3 and under are already using computers. Sixteen percent use them several times a week, 21 percent can point and click with a mouse by themselves and 11 percent can turn on the computer without assistance.

Healy recommends kids stay off computers until age 7. Others suggest 3 is OK to start. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time before 2, worried youngsters may get discouraged if they talk to a computer monitor and get no response.

David Elkind, professor of child development at Tufts University, is concerned that kids are overdeveloping visual senses at the expense of touch or sound. "Children miss out on all these basic learning experiences if they are so attuned to the virtual world," he said.

Yet some researchers as well as developers of the Web sites and software aimed at young kids see nothing wrong with exposing children to technology early - as long as it's done in moderation.

"Kids need a good balance in their lives and a mix of experiences," said Peter Grunwald, whose consulting firm specializes in kids and technology.

In other words, don't force technology on children and don't turn it into a babysitter while cooking dinner. Through common sense use, Grunwald said, computers can help kids develop hand-eye coordination and other skills.

Yong Zhao, a professor of educational psychology at Michigan State University, bought his daughter an iMac before she turned 1 and had her simply bang on the keyboard. Eventually, he said, his daughter picked up on how the banging led to changes on-screen.

Young kids should be supervised while surfing the Web anyhow, so early Internet use offers a chance for "spending time with your kids and seeing what they react to," said Regina Lewis, consumer adviser for America Online Inc., which has "KOL Jr." section for ages 2 to 5.

Developers of the kids site Googles.com - not to be confused with the search engine - say their games and songs promote self-esteem. Scholastic Inc. says its Clifford products teach reading and music - not to mention computing.

Others say they can't possibly quell their kids' curiosity for a machine their parents - and older siblings - are using so much.

"The same way that every little kid who's starting to walk goes into the kitchen and takes pans out of the cabinet, they see their parents doing things and they want to do them, too," said Jim Robinson, an advertising executive who created Kneebouncers.com initially for his then-9-month-old daughter.

The site - one of a number of so-called lapware for toddlers to toy with on parents' laps - has Flash-animated games with lots of noise and bright colors. Robinson said he gets e-mail of thanks from parents of kids as young as 5 months old.

Beyond the home, computers are increasingly creeping into daycare and preschool environments, in turn pressuring parents to get computers as soon as their child is born, said Peggy Meszaros, director of Virginia Tech's Center for Information Technology Impacts on Children, Youth and Families.

"Parents today are so obsessed with giving children every academic advantage, they've been persuaded that if they wait a minute to introduce children to computers and technology, that somehow their children will be behind," she said.

But if those same parents talked to teachers, they'd learn that kids pick up keyboarding and mouse skills easily even if they wait, said Patricia Cantor, chairwoman of Plymouth State University's education department.

More research is needed, proponents and skeptics agree.

"What's happening is the market is proceeding at a faster pace than the research," said Kathryn Montgomery, a communications professor at American University. "It's taken awhile for the academics to reach a point where they are addressing these questions. The marketers, they were clearly on the case 10 years ago."

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